

IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

Claims 1-94 (Canceled).

Claim 95 (Currently Amended): ~~A data classification method of classifying a group of data which a data storage unit stores into a plurality of sets in accordance with data values~~
An image processing method of processing image data obtained by picking up an image in a predetermined image pick-up field, comprising:

setting luminance data, as a group of data, which is obtained by picking up an image pattern of an object and an image pattern of a background which exists in the predetermined image pick-up field;

estimating N boundary candidates, wherein N is an integer of 2 or more, ~~for dividing~~
used to divide said group of data into a first number of sets on the basis of ~~[[said]]~~ data values; ~~[[and]]~~

extracting M boundary candidates, wherein M is smaller than N, and used to divide said group of data into a second number of sets smaller than said first number, under a predetermined extraction condition, on the basis of said N boundary candidates, ~~wherein~~

~~said group of data is edge detection data obtained by edge detecting image pick-up data of each of pixels obtained by picking up different image patterns in a predetermined image pick-up field in accordance with positions of said pixels, and said boundary candidates are positions of said pixels; and~~

identifying a boundary between said object and said background using said M boundary candidates.

Claim 96 (Previously Presented): The method according to claim 95, wherein said predetermined extraction condition includes a condition that said M boundary candidates are extracted on the basis of a magnitude of a data value indicated by each of said N boundary candidates.

Claim 97 (Previously Presented): The method according to claim 96, wherein said predetermined extraction condition includes a condition that a boundary candidate with which said data value is maximized is extracted.

Claim 98 (Currently Amended): The method according to claim 95, wherein said group of data are arranged at positions in a predetermined direction, and said predetermined extraction condition includes a condition that said M boundary candidates are extracted on the basis of [[the]] respective positions of said N boundary candidates.

Claim 99 (Previously Presented): The method according to claim 95, wherein said group of data are differential data obtained by differentiating image pick-up data of each of pixels obtained by picking up different image patterns in a predetermined image pick-up field in accordance with positions of said pixels, and said data value is a differential value of said image pick-up data.

Claim 100 (Currently Amended): The method according to claim 95, wherein said N is two, and said M is one.

Claim 101 (Previously Presented): The method according to claim 95, wherein said group of data are luminance data of each of pixels obtained by picking up different image patterns in a predetermined image pick-up field.

Claim 102 (Currently Amended): ~~A data classification apparatus for classifying a group of data which a data storage unit stores into a plurality of sets in accordance with data values~~ An image processing apparatus for processing image data obtained by picking up an image in a predetermined image pick-up field, wherein luminance data which is obtained by picking up an image pattern of an object and an image pattern of a background which exists in the predetermined image pick-up field is set as a group of data, comprising:

a first data dividing unit which estimates N boundary candidates, wherein N is an integer of 2 or more, ~~for dividing~~ used to divide said group of data into a first number of sets on the basis of ~~[[said]]~~ data values; and

a second data dividing unit which is electrically connected to the first data dividing unit and extracts M boundary candidates, wherein M is smaller than N, ~~and is used to divide~~ said group of data into a second number of sets smaller than said first number, under a predetermined extraction condition, on the basis of said N boundary candidates, ~~wherein~~

~~said group of data is edge detection data obtained by edge detecting image pick-up data of each of pixels obtained by picking up different image patterns in a predetermined image pick-up field in accordance with positions of said pixels, and said boundary candidates are positions of said pixels; and~~

a controller which identifies a boundary between said object and said background using said M boundary candidates.

Claim 103 (Previously Presented): The apparatus according to claim 102, wherein

said group of data are differential data obtained by differentiating image pick-up data of each of pixels obtained by picking up different image patterns in a predetermined image pick-up field in accordance with positions of said pixels, and

said data value is a differential value of said image pick-up data.

Claim 104 (Currently Amended): The apparatus according to claim 102, wherein said N is two, and said M is one.

Claims 105-106 (Canceled).

Claim 107 (Withdrawn/Currently Amended): An exposure method of transferring a predetermined pattern onto a substrate, comprising:

specifying an outer shape of said substrate by using the image processing method according to claim [[105]] 95;

controlling a rotational position of said substrate on the basis of said specified outer shape of said substrate;

detecting a mark formed on said substrate after said rotational position is controlled;
and

transferring said predetermined pattern onto said substrate while positioning said substrate on the basis of a mark detection result obtained in said mark detection.

Claim 108 (Withdrawn/Currently Amended): An exposure apparatus for transferring a predetermined pattern onto a substrate, comprising:

an outer shape specifying unit including the image processing apparatus according to claim [[106]] 102, which specifies an outer shape of said substrate;

a rotational position control unit which is electrically connected to the outer shape specifying unit and controls a rotational position of said substrate on the basis of said outer shape of said substrate which is specified by said image processing apparatus;

a mark detection unit which detects a mark formed on said substrate whose rotational position is controlled by said rotational position control unit; and

a positioning unit which is electrically connected to the mark detection unit and positions said substrate on the basis of a mark detection result obtained by said mark position detection unit,

wherein said predetermined pattern is transferred onto said substrate while said substrate is positioned by said positioning unit.

Claims 109-111 (Canceled).

Claim 112 (Withdrawn/Currently Amended): A recording medium on which an image processing control program executed by an image processing apparatus for processing image data obtained by picking up an image in a predetermined image pick-up field is recorded, wherein

said image processing control program comprises:

allowing luminance data which is obtained by picking up an image pattern of an object and an image pattern of a background which exist in said predetermined image pick-up field to be set as a group of data;

a data classification control program which allows said luminance data which a data storage unit stores to be classified, comprising

allowing N [[of]] boundary candidates, ~~where~~ wherein N is an integer of 2 or more,
~~for dividing~~ used to divide said group of data into a first number of sets to be estimated on the
basis of said data values;

allowing M boundary candidates, wherein M is smaller than N, used to divide said
group of data into a second number of sets smaller than said first number, under a
predetermined extraction condition, to be extracted on the basis of said N boundary
candidates; and

allowing a boundary between said object and said background to be identified;
~~wherein~~

~~said group of data is edge detection data obtained by edge detecting image pick up
data of each of pixels obtained by picking up different image patterns in a predetermined
image pick up field in accordance with positions of said pixels, and said boundary candidates
are positions of said pixels.~~

Claims 113-114 (Canceled).

Claim 115 (Withdrawn): A device manufacturing method including a lithography
process, wherein

exposure is performed by using the exposure method according to claim 107 in said
lithography process.

Claim 116 (Canceled).